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FIRST 5 PRESCHOOL FOR ALL PROGRAM KICKS OFF IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

*Children in Redwood City begin classes as part of San Mateo County's
\$13 million Preschool for All program*

SAN MATEO – First 5 California Chair Rob Reiner joined officials in Redwood City today to announce the beginning of San Mateo County's Preschool for All program. San Mateo County is one of the first counties in California to implement Preschool for All, committing more than \$13 million over the first three years to offer voluntary preschool to children throughout the county, beginning in Redwood City. Program funding is provided by First 5 San Mateo County, First 5 California, San Mateo County Board of Supervisors and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

"Today more kids have the opportunity to go to preschool and get a jump-start on life," said Rob Reiner, Chair of First 5 California. "Preschool builds a foundation for the future, and by making this investment in our kids, we're giving them a huge boost toward success."

Quality preschool gives children the tools and experiences they need to thrive in kindergarten and beyond. Children who attend quality preschools do better in reading and math, develop better social and emotional skills and have more self-confidence. They are also more likely to graduate from high school and go to college. A recent RAND Corporation report shows that an investment in universal preschool for California's 4-year-olds would benefit children academically and would reduce costs associated with special education, grade retention and juvenile arrests.

First 5 San Mateo County has made a 10-year commitment to continue funding Preschool for All. Currently, 35 percent of San Mateo County's 3- to 5-year-old children are not enrolled in preschool. A recent Fight Crime: Invest in Kids California survey found that 67 percent of San Mateo County's publicly funded preschools have waiting lists. Another survey conducted in the county revealed that more than 70 percent of families would enroll their children in a quality preschool program that is affordable or free.

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With the leadership of the San Mateo County Office of Education, First 5 San Mateo County aims to “raise the bar” of preschool program quality by establishing rigorous quality standards for all participating programs in the areas of assessment, curriculum and staffing.

In Redwood City, 80 4-year-olds filed into classrooms last week to begin preschool classes, which will run through July 15. Ninety-two State Preschool slots are also being upgraded as part of the program. Classes will be opening in the Ravenswood School District area by Fall 2005. Preschools in these communities were selected to participate in the new Preschool for All program based on the need for early learning programs in the area—more than 10 percent of San Mateo County’s preschool-age children live in those communities. The program also makes an effort to address the needs of children with special needs and disabilities. Twenty percent of the school district’s newly enrolled preschoolers have a special need or disability.

“Through this partnership, we are leveling the playing field for the children of San Mateo County,” said Kris Perry, Executive Director of First 5 San Mateo County. “All children deserve an opportunity to attend preschool. With Preschool for All, we’re going to make that happen.”

By the end of June 2005, at least 24 classrooms will serve more than 500 children and by June 2007 more than 1,400 children will be served in a variety of classroom settings.

Preschool for All is building momentum statewide. First 5 California State and County Commissions are providing more than \$1 billion over the next few years to help provide quality preschool programs in the state. First 5 LA in Los Angeles County launched the start of classes in their Preschool for All program just two weeks ago, and San Francisco, Santa Clara and Alpine counties are also moving forward with Preschool for All programs.

First 5 California and the 58 First 5 County Commissions were established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs for expectant parents and children up to age 5. For more information, visit www.first5california.com.

First 5 San Mateo County, the local First 5 County Commission, has invested approximately \$40 million in Prop. 10 revenues for programs and services that meet local needs.

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